

the potato famine in 1846. That event caused a loss of population by starvation and immigration which has never been recovered. Absentee landlordism also has been a permanent source of loss to the country by the large amount of produce and money annually sent abroad in payment for rents. The fact that bank deposits have increased and that Ireland has retained within her limits a large fund of gold and silver, in spite of these obstacles to her progress, is high evidence of the productive and thrifty character of the Irish people and the sound judgment of their bankers.

The earliest banking in Ireland seems to have been done by brokers or intermediaries, who brought borrowers and lenders together for a consideration. The business of issuing promissory notes against deposits of coin gradually grew up among the goldsmiths and tradesmen, who carried it on in addition to their regular callings. These notes were given a legal status as negotiable instruments by an Act of 1709, which made them assignable and transferable by endorsement. There were no banking laws to prevent fraud and failure, and the losses by the failure of banks or exchangers was estimated as early as 1682 at having been ^50,000 within a few years.<sup>1</sup> The Act of 1709 gave the power to protest inland as well as foreign bills and promissory notes for non-acceptance or non-payment. The Irish House of Commons acted as a court of bankruptcy and a special act of Parliament was necessary for the liquidation of the affairs of an insolvent institution. The first act of the kind on record is in 1721, which was passed for the relief of the creditors of Mead and Curtis, a Dublin firm which had suspended on June 14, 1727. A bill for the relief of Burton and Falkiner of Dublin was passed in 1733 but the final legislation regarding the affairs of this firm was not passed until 1757. The firm had acted as bankers for the government and their failure seems to have been due to their large holdings of landed property, which could not be turned into cash when needed.

A series of failures took place in 1755 and 1756, which led

<sup>1</sup> Dillon, 17.